

Declassified documents prove that the United States helped cover up the 1940 Katyn massacre, in which the Soviets slaughtered 22,000 Polish officers.

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Newly declassified Army documents prove that two American prisoners of war wrote coded messages to Army intelligence after visiting Katyn in 1943, pointing to Soviet guilt in the 1940 massacre.

The government cover-up began during World War II, when the United States needed the Soviets to defeat Germany and Japan.

After decades of denial, the Soviets admitted the massacre in 1990.

Newly declassified U.S. Army documents reveal that two American prisoners of war sent secret coded messages to Army intelligence after visiting Katyn in 1943, pointing to Soviet culpability for the 1940 massacre.

After seeing rows of corpses in the Katyn forest on the western edge of Russia, American prisoners of war told Washington that they believed Nazi claims that the Soviets had killed 22,000 Polish officers.

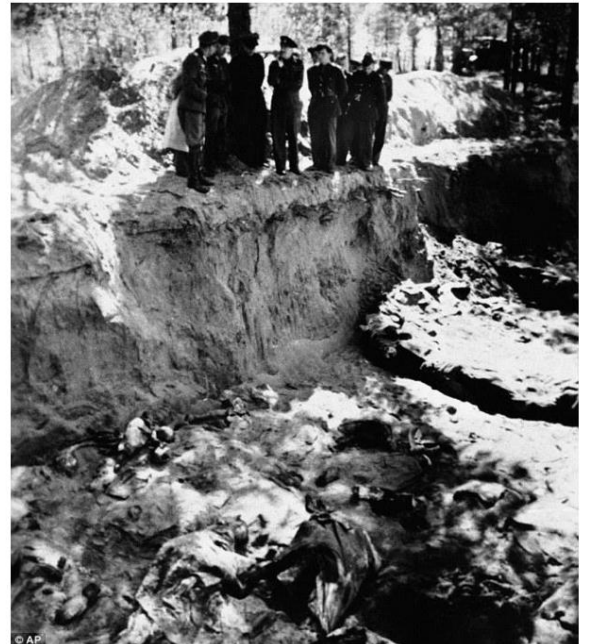
After seeing the advanced state of decomposition of the bodies, the prisoners of war concluded that the killings must have been carried out by the Soviets and not by the Nazis, who had only recently invaded the area around the Katyn Forest.

The documents shed further light on the decades of denial of Soviet guilt within the U.S. government that began during World War II, when blame for the massacre was placed on Nazi Germany. It has long been suspected that President Franklin Roosevelt did not want to anger Joseph Stalin, an ally the Americans counted on to defeat Germany and Japan.

Some scholars believe that eyewitness testimony about the infamous massacre of Polish officers might have mitigated Poland's tragic fate under the Soviets.

The documents released Monday reinforce allegations that repression at the highest levels of the U.S. government helped cover up Soviet culpability in the murder of some 22,000 Polish officers and other prisoners in the Katyn Forest and other sites in 1940.

The evidence is among approximately 1,000 pages of newly declassified documents that the United States National Archives released and posted online on Monday.



Katyn Massacre: This 1952 photo shows a view of a partially emptied mass grave in the Katyn Forest where some 22,000 Polish men were killed. Newly declassified documents show that the U.S. government helped cover up Soviet responsibility



Cover-up: Secret messages from the two American prisoners of war about the massacre - what unknown to historians - confirm that the Roosevelt administration was relatively early on influenced by the Soviet Atrocity knew

The most dramatic revelation to date is the discovery of secret codes sent by the two American prisoners of war - something unknown to historians and which provides evidence that the Roosevelt administration knew about the Soviet atrocities relatively early on.

The declassified documents also show that the United States claimed it could not definitively determine guilt until a Russian admission in 1990 - a claim that seems unlikely given the ample evidence of Soviet guilt that had already emerged decades earlier. Historians say the new material helps complete the story of what the U.S. knew and when.

The Soviet secret police killed the 22,000 Poles by shooting them in the back of the head. Their goal was to eliminate a military and intellectual elite that would have resisted Soviet control. The men were among Poland's finest - officers and reserve officers who in their civilian lives worked as doctors, lawyers, teachers or in other professions. Their loss is a permanent wound for the Polish nation.

In the early postwar years, outrage among some American officials over the cover-up prompted the creation of a special committee of the U.S. Congress to investigate Katyn.

In its final report, published in 1952, the committee stated that there was no doubt about Soviet guilt and called the massacre "one of the most barbaric international crimes in world history."

It found that Roosevelt's administration had suppressed public knowledge of the crime, but said this was done out of military necessity. The committee also recommended that the administration prosecute the Soviets in an international court, but this was never done.

Despite the committee's clear conclusions, the White House remained silent on Katyn for decades, demonstrating its unwillingness to address an issue that would have increased political tensions with the Soviets during the Cold War.



Fraud: It has long been suspected that President Franklin Roosevelt (center) did not want to upset Joseph Stalin (left), an ally the Americans counted on to defeat Germany and Japan during World War II. In this 1943 archive photo, Stalin, Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill meet for the first time to discuss Allied plans for the war against Germany and postwar cooperation in the United Nations

It was in May 1943 in the Katyn Forest, a part of Russia that the Germans had conquered from the Soviets in 1941, that a group of American and British prisoners of war were taken against their will by their German captors to a clearing surrounded by pine trees, where they were met with a gruesome sight: mass graves, packed tightly together with thousands of partially mummified corpses in well-tailored Polish officer uniforms.

The Americans - Capt. Donald B. Stewart and Lt. Col. John H. Van Vliet Jr. - hated the Nazis and refused to believe the Germans. They had seen the Germans' atrocities first hand, and the Soviets were, after all, their allies. The Germans hoped to use the POWs for their propaganda and to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and its Western allies.

But when the Americans returned to their POW camps, they were convinced that they had just seen overwhelming evidence of Soviet guilt. The advanced state of decomposition of the bodies told them that the killings had taken place much earlier in the war, when the Soviets still controlled the area.

They also saw Polish letters, diaries, dog tags, newspaper clippings and other items from the graves, none of which were dated later than the spring of 1940. The evidence that most convinced them was the good condition of the men's boots and clothing: this told them that the men had not lived long after their capture.



Fighting: Franciszek Herzog, 81, holds up a picture of his father, who died in the massacre. Herzog has been hoping for more openness from the US since Gorbachev's admission in 1990 and has already made three attempts to obtain an apology from President George HW Bush

Stewart testified to a congressional committee in 1951 about what he had seen, and Van Vliet wrote reports on Katyn in 1945 and 1950, the first of which mysteriously disappeared. The now declassified documents show that both of them sent secret coded messages to the

Army intelligence service expressing their opinion about the guilt of the Soviets.

This is an important revelation because it shows that the Roosevelt administration received early information about Soviet guilt from credible U.S. sources - and yet ignored it in favor of the alliance with Stalin.

In one of the documents, the head of the Army Intelligence Service, General Clayton Bissell, confirms that a few months after the US officers visited Katyn in 1943, an encrypted

A request was sent to Van Vliet by MIS-X, a military intelligence unit, asking him to "express his opinion on Katyn." Bissell's note states: "It is believed that Colonel Van Vliet and Captain Stewart also responded.

MIS-X helped prisoners of war held behind German lines escape and also used the prisoners to gather intelligence.

A 1950 statement by Stewart confirms that he received and sent coded messages to Washington during the war, including one about Katyn: "The content of my report was aprx (approximately): The German claims about Katyn are, in the opinion of Van Vliet and myself, substantially correct.

The newly uncovered documents also show that in 1950 - just before the congressional committee began its work - Stewart was instructed never to discuss a secret message about Katyn.

Krystyna Piorkowska, author of the recently published book "English-Speaking Witnesses to Katyn: Recent Research," discovered the documents containing the coded messages more than a week ago. She was one of several researchers who saw the material before it was published.

She had already discovered in her research that Van Vliet and Stewart were "code users" who had sent messages about other matters, but this is the first discovery that they communicated about Katyn, she said.

Another Katyn expert, Allen Paul, author of the book "Katyn: Stalin's Massacre and the Triumph of Truth," said the find was "potentially explosive." He said the material does not appear in the records of the 1951-52 congressional hearings and appears to have been suppressed.

He argues that the cover-up in the United States delayed a full understanding of the true character of Stalinism - an understanding that came only later, after the Soviets detonated an atomic bomb in 1949 and Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe were already behind the Iron Curtain.

"The Poles knew what Stalin's true intentions were long before the end of the war," says Paul. The West's refusal to listen to them on the Katyn issue was a devastating blow that made their fate even worse.

History provides further evidence that Roosevelt knew of the Soviet guilt in 1943. One of the most important pieces of news that landed on Roosevelt's desk was a lengthy and detailed report sent to him by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. It was signed by



Murdered: New evidence shows that the US government helped cover up Soviet guilt in the murder of some 22,000 Polish officers. Franciszek Herzog, here in 1938, died in the massacres

British ambassador to the Polish government in exile in London, Owen O'Malley, and pointed out the Soviet guilt for Katyn.

O'Malley wrote: "There is now a whole body of negative evidence, the cumulative effect of which raises serious doubts about Russian admissions of responsibility for the massacre.

Only in the last days of Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe did the reform-oriented head of state Mikhail Gorbachev publicly admit Soviet guilt for Katyn - an important step towards Polish-Russian reconciliation.

The silence of the US government has caused great frustration among many Polish Americans.

One of them is Franciszek Herzog, 81, a man from Connecticut whose father and uncle were killed in the massacre. After Gorbachev's admission in 1990, he hoped for more openness from the United States and made three attempts to obtain an apology from President George HW Bush.

'It will not bring men back to life,' he wrote to Bush. But it will provide moral satisfaction to the widows and orphans of the victims.

A response he received from the State Department in 1992 did not satisfy him. His correspondence with the government is also among the newly declassified documents and was made available to the AP early on by the George Bush Presidential Library.

In the letter, dated August 12, 1992, and signed by Thomas Gerth, then deputy director of the Office for East European Affairs, the government explains that it lacked irrefutable evidence until Gorbachev's admission:

The US government never accepted the Soviet government's claim that it was not responsible for the massacre. However, at the time of the congressional hearings in 1951-1952, the US did not have the facts that could clearly refute the Soviet claims that these crimes were committed by the Third Reich. These facts, as you know, were not revealed until 1990, when the Russians officially apologized to Poland.

Herzog was frustrated by this answer.

There's a big difference between not knowing and not wanting to know," Herzog said. I think the U.S. government didn't want to know because it was uncomfortable for them.

Decades of denial and deception: How one of the most barbaric crimes of World history was covered up

September 1939: World War II begins with the German invasion of Poland from the west, followed by the Soviet invasion from the east. The partition of Poland is the result of a secret pact between Adolf Hitler's Germany and Josef Stalin's Soviet Union. The Soviets soon capture thousands of Polish officers and place them in Russian prisoner of war camps. They also deport hundreds of thousands of Polish civilians to Siberia.

April-May 1940: Soviet secret police kill 22,000 Polish officers and other prisoners of war and bury their bodies in mass graves. The killings, carried out by shots to the back of the head, take place in the Katyn Forest in western Russia and elsewhere.

At this time, the officers' letters to their families suddenly stop, causing the relatives to despair and the belief in Poland that the Soviets had killed them. When the Polish leadership questions them about the fate of the officers, the Soviets begin to deny their guilt for decades.

1941: Germany attacks the Soviet Union and overruns the Katyn area as it advances eastward. The Soviets join the Allies in the war against Hitler.

April 1943: Nazi Germany's propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels announces the German discovery of the mass graves at Katyn. Goebbels hopes that public knowledge of the Soviet crime will sow distrust between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies and weaken their alliance.

May 1943: As part of Nazi propaganda, the Germans bring a group of American and British prisoners of war, as well as other groups, to Katyn to view the remains of Poles in the mass graves, which are in an advanced state of decomposition.

May 1945: World War II ends. After his liberation, Lieutenant Colonel John H. Van Vliet gives his first report to Army Intelligence about what he experienced in Katyn, a report that disappeared and has not been found to this day.

1951: The US Congress establishes a committee to investigate the crimes of Katyn after questions arise about the whereabouts of the missing Van Vliet report from 1945. Even before the committee is officially established, Van Vliet submits a second written report on his impressions of Katyn in 1950.

1952: The Congressional committee concludes that the Soviets are undoubtedly to blame for the massacre. It accuses the Roosevelt administration of suppressing public knowledge of the truth. The report also suspects that pro-Soviet sympathizers in government agencies buried knowledge of Katyn. It expresses anger over the disappearance of the first Van Vliet report, saying: "This committee is of the opinion that our government policy toward Soviet Russia would have been more realistic and would have led to happier postwar results if the Van Vliet report had been made immediately available to the State Department and the American public.

1990: Reform-minded Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev publicly admits that the Soviets are to blame for Katyn.

September 10, 2012: The US National Archives publishes around 1,000 pages of newly declassified documents on the Katyn massacre. Among them are US Army documents proving that two American prisoners of war wrote coded messages to the Army intelligence service, MIS-X, shortly after their visit to Katyn in 1943, pointing to the Soviet

point out guilt.

[source](#)

The following 2 pages show original photographs from a private photo archive.



